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ABSTRACT

Intended for language learning disabled college students and their tutors, the booklet examines the use of words as aids in understanding an author's meaning. Suggestions are offered to help students adopt a more comfortable and effective reading style. The first section examines ways to decipher authors' context cues for information. Eight categories into which most text-related cues fall are listed. Word structure is analyzed in terms of sound, syllables, accent, and spelling patterns. Word meaning is considered through the impact of plurals, possessives, and affixes (prefixes and suffixes). Examples are provided throughout, including a list of common roots and their meanings. (CL)

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Postsecondary Intervention Model for Learning Disabilities
The Barkley Memorial Center
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

WORD STUDY: A PROBLEM-SOLVING STRATEGY FOR READING COMPREHENSION

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Study Manual #2
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For PS IM LD:

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WORD STUDY: A PROBLEM SOLVING STRATEGY FOR READING COMPREHENSION

From the time that a person is about two years old, communication through the use of WORDS is a common part of his/her existence. As the individual matures, the accurate transmission and reception of words begins to take on an even greater importance. PS IM LD has prepared information regarding the use, the meaning, and the structure of WORDS: the building blocks of all language. This information is presented not merely to describe the physical properties of words, but also to show the student how the physical properties of words help the reader to predict the message(s) that will be received from those words.It is expected that as the student becomes more aware of word structure, s/he will become more adept at using modifications in that structure as a clue to understanding meaning.

Section I of this manual draws students' attention to the expedient use of authors' contextual information to promote accurate and efficient reading comprehension. Sections II and III deal, respectively, with sound-symbol and with structural cues to aid word identification. Taken together, the sections are intended to aid the LLD student and the project tutor in their common effort to adopt a more comfortable and effective reading style.

I. Word Use as a Predictor of Context Meaning

When students understand the functions that words perform, they are then better able to understand correct meanings when they read (Goodman, 1970). The ability to perceive cues or clues in the use of words helps to bring order and make sense out of what is being read. Reading involves a mutual interaction between thought and language. Efficient reading results from "selecting the fewest, most productive cues necessary to produce educated and accurate guesses (Goodman, 1967). Most people are accustomed to finding cues to word meaning in

the context of what is read, written, or even heard. When we are able to complete a speaker's unfinished sentence because of our prior experiences with that subject (recall), we are responding to context cues. The experienced student uses the other words surrounding the unknown word to help decipher the meaning and purpose of that unknown word. In other words, the student's comprehension of the passage combined with his/her prior knowledge, actually help to identify the meaning of unknown words (Weaver, 1980). The context serves both to predict the meaning of the unknown word and to suggest what the author might be going to say in succeeding sentences and/or paragraphs. The most efficient readers use context clues and intuitive information to make inferences as they read. By using all of this information together, the reader is then able to confirm or correct his/her interpretation of the passage being read (Weaver, 1980).

For example:

1. If an author writes, "when the waje flew high in the air, the child began to cry," even the most astute reader won't be able to accurately label "waje" and therefore understand the author's sentence. There are many things capable of flight; but not many of these cause tears! But, if "balloon" is substituted for the unclear word, then the author's meaning becomes much clearer!

2. If a student were to read, "The small animal has been classified by most scientists as a pseudopod," s/he could, by being aware of Greek prefix for "false" and "pod" is the root for "foot," then the reader knows that these scientists have to be talking about an animal species that is distinguished by a kind of false foot! This is not such a complex sentence after all!

In order for context clues to be accurate predictors of meaning, the words that suggest these clues (cues) need to be well-chosen and unobscure. The student must be able to "retrieve, recognize, and apply past knowledge and experience" to use these cues effectively. Then "words" such as "waje" and "pseudopod" become familiar rather than strange (Johnson and Johnson, 1984).

We predict on the basis of prior knowledge, and we predict through the use of contextual word cues. And, we learn to do this long before we come to school. When a young child finishes a nursey rhyme that the parent is reciting, the child is demonstrating the ability to predict on the basis of a learned language pattern (Weaver, 1980). We predict rain from a cloudy sky and snow from a cold, grey one. We predict anger from an angry facial expression and tears from a sad one. Most of this is inferred automatically; that is, the individual is barely aware of the process. What the student needs to be reminded of here, however, is that the same processes of "semi-automatic prediction" can serve him/her well in the reading of college texts and related materials.

Students should be aware that most text-related cues fall into one or more of eight categories.

1. Temporal cues imply duration or frequency.
2. Spatial cues refer to location.
3. Values cues denote the worth or desirability.
4. Attribute cues describe a property or characteristic.
5. Functional cues talk about purposes or use of something.
6. Enablement cues refer to causes or conditions.
7. Class cues tell the reader to which group something belongs.
8. Equivalence cues provide an antonym or synonym for something.

(Sternberg, Powell, and Kaye, 1985)

Although these are considered text-related cues, the clues which they offer may apply to concepts and ideas as well as to concrete objects. To illustrate how the student might go about finding these cues to use in analyzing the meaning of a sentence, please consider "At dawn, **sol** arose on the horizon and shone brightly." "At dawn" provides a temporal cue, describing

when the arising of "sol occurred." "Arose" provides a functional cue, describing an action that sol can perform. "On the horizon" gives the reader a spatial cue, describing where the arising of sol took place. "Shone" provides another functional cue describing another action that sol can do! Finally, "brightly" provides another functional cue describing a property (brightness) of the shining of sol. With all of these different contextual cues and upon the basis of prior experience with these words, it should not take the average student too long to conclude that sol refers to the sun (Sternberg, Powell, and Kaye, 1985).

Using the context surrounding an unknown word as a predictor of its meaning is using external cues. Using analysis of the word itself to gather information in order to ascertain its correct meaning is using internal cues (Johnson and Pearson, 1984). Both of these processes are invaluable aids to students in their efforts to unlock the meanings of unknown words, so that they may better comprehend what they read (Weaver, 1980). The explanations above have considered external cues. The discussion which follows deals with the internal cues - cues in the word itself. A knowledge of appropriate internal cues is considered important in predicting the meaning of what is being read. A physical analysis of a word and its parts is often helpful to the reader.

II. Word Structure

The written word is an agreed upon marking or code that signifies a spoken sound. This type of analysis helps the reader pronounce and "become friends with" words that s/he might have found unfamiliar. Thus, the physical letter "b" has come to represent the first sound that a person hears in "boy," and the letter "l" represents the last sound heard in "girl." These sound-symbol correspondences are merely conventions, agreed upon and used by the speakers of a particular language to codify communication in that language. The two

letters above are, of course, consonants, a designation familiar from childhood schooling. When two or more consonant sounds merge definably, a consonant blend is "formed." Words with blends such as "chemistry," "library," or "structure" present a slightly greater challenge. The pronunciation of words like "psychology, "anthropology," "church," "phone," "philosophy," or "English" is affected by digraphs, whereby the sounds of two letters are joined together to indicate a new sound that is different from either of them alone. The most complex sound-symbol correspondence is represented by letters called vowels: "a, e, i, o, u" and often "y" sounding like "i." Again, students are familiar with the term, "long," referring to the sounds in words such as "gate," "me," "five," "home," and "cube," where the vowel sound is equivalent to the letter name of that vowel and with the term, "short," as exemplified by the sounds in the words "pat," "pet," "pit," "pot," and "put." The most complex vowel sounds are labelled, diphthongs. In these words, such as "coin," "down," "play," or "geography," the letters represent a sound that seems to slide from a particular vowel sound to the one next to it.

Analyzing the sound, or phonetic features, is but one way of describing the structure of a word. Errorless mastery of sound-symbol correspondence is not always necessary in order for the reader to understand printed information. This mastery is considered to be of secondary importance for the young adult student seeking meaning from college texts. It is, however, considered a useful tool for pronunciation, whether the student is reading about "Akim Akimitch" in a Dostoyevsky novel or is reading a relatively simple passage in his/her native English. Having an awareness of the sound systems and written spelling conventions of a language provides "reading power" for students. That power is generated from the student's ability to pronounce words that s/he might not already recognize in print. Hopefully, once the student has

identified the word, s/he will recall the meaning of that word from his/her own speaking and listening vocabulary (Johnson and Pearson, 1984).

Another common way of describing words is according to the number of syllables, or "sound pulsations," in that word. Thus the student can hear that the word "Ne-bras-ka," has three syllables, "u-ni-ver-si-ty," has five, while "please" has only one. Rules governing standard written syllabication are found in most dictionaries and grammar handbooks. Readers can utilize their awareness of syllables within words to boost their recall for specific terms. This can be both an efficient test-preparation and spelling aid. For example, it may be possible for a student to learn a particular list of related terms by organizing them into clusters of 2-3-4 syllable words.

The use of accent is another auditory feature pertaining to the structures of words. In words of more than one syllable, one of those syllables is stressed (orally) more than the others are. "University" is pronounced with the stress on the third syllable; "Nebraska" is pronounced with the stress - or accent - on the second syllable; "geography" accents the second; and "biology" accents the second, too. Again, as with syllabication, most college students need not be overly concerned with the written technicalities of stress and accent. A student mainly needs to feel comfortable with his/her ability to pronounce, divide, and use words according to standard usage. In addition, s/he should keep in mind that two words that are spelled the same are often pronounced, accented, and understood differently. In these kinds of cases, as in the two examples below, the reader must also seek out external clues in the context surrounding the target word, to both pronounce and understand that word.

For example:

The student was con<u>tent</u> with the class lecture.
The student questioned the <u>con</u>tent of the class lecture.

Content in the first sentence implies peacefulness, while content in the second one suggests substance.

The student tried to perfect the perfect novel.

The eyes see the same word; but the mouth and brain do not treat each of the words identically! The reader is thus required to make use of both internal and external cues in the effort to derive appropriate meaning from the sentences.

The last structural feature that will be discussed here refers to the spelling patterns inherent in the English language. Since words in all languages tend to exhibit these patterns (word families), students should be aware of common spelling clusters in their own language. Having an awareness of spelling patterns in language can serve as a significant aid in reading. Again, if the student is able to read (decode) a word, the meaning of that word may often be recalled from the student's own prior experiences. The student, assisted by the PS IM LD tutor, should study the chart below in order to derive examples of these patterns from his/her own vocabulary. PS IM LD literature frequently stresses the importance of pattern awareness in one's college studies. Noting spelling sequences in words is just another example of the attempt to find order in one's world. More instances illustrating the importance of spelling patterns as an internal aid in reading prediction may be found in the discussion of affixes in the next section.

ABBREVIATED LIST OF WORD FAMILIES

aim	an	are	at	ace
ain	ance	atch	ack	air
and	arm	ate	act	ave
ad	ake	ade	alk	all
aze	age	am	ask	aid
ame	ar	ail		
ead	eat	elp	eak	ess
eal	ed	eer	est	eam
eed	ean	end	etch	ent
ew	ear			
ib	ince	itch	ibe	ike
is	ite	ick	ile	ise
ive	id	ill	ink	ish
ide	ilt	int	isk	ist
ire				
oach	oad	ock	oor	ort
oak	od	ome	oal	ode
on	op	ope	otch	or
oap	oid	orb	ow	oil
ord	owe	oat	oke	oom
ore	ole	oon	ork	oy
ub	ume	ur	ush	ube
uge	un	ure	uck	ule
urn	uss	ud	ull	une
ust	ude	unk	us	uff
up	use	ute		

(Johnson and Pearson, 1984)

III. Word Meaning

Numerous structural (syntactical) features of words serve to identify changes in meaning (semantics) for both the careful writer and the observant reader. Some of those structural features relate to the way writers indicate plurals, possessives, and affixes in the words they use. The student should be aware that although "plurals," "possessives," and "affixes" refer to structural characteristics of words, they are studied here mainly because of their impact on the meaning of those words.

Plurals (J. M. Rule, 1963)

1. Most nouns form their plurals by adding "s" to the singular, as in:

Singular	Plural
game	games
chief	chiefs
boy	boys

To say, "We won the game" does not give the same message to the reader as "We won the games." "The boy is chief" is different from "The boys are chiefs." The reader knows this because of the plural marker "s," because of the plural form of the verb "to be," and because of prior knowledge of cues in our language.

2. Some ending in s, z, x, ch, sh add es for the plural, instead of just s, such as:

Singular	Plural
church	churches
rush	rushes
box	boxes

The minister is more likely to speak in only one church on a given Sunday - rather than in many churches. Again, the student's prior experience with English language patterns (subject-verb agreement, plural forms, etc.) can serve as a real aid to accurate perception cues in written language.

3. Words ending in a "y" that is preceded by a vowel, add only "s", as in:

Singular	Plural
play	plays
valley	valleys
monkey	monkeys

For example, the singer croons, "Down in the valley" and not "down in the valleys!" Experienced speakers of English know that we say "The monkey climbs the tree(s)," and "The monkeys climb the tree(s).

4. But words ending in a letter y that is preceded by a consonant, change the y to an i and then add es; such as:

Singular	Plural
philosophy	philosophies
grocery	groceries
sky	skies

For example: The student bought his groceries in a grocery store. To speak of "sky" or "skies" probably will not change the meaning of a passage; but "the philosophy" is not the same as "the philosophies."

5. All nouns ending in o and preceded by a vowel, add an s when used in the plural, as in:

Singular	Plural
Eskimo	Eskimos
radio	radios
ratio	ratios

For example: If only one radio is being played full volume in the dorm, it is easier to study then if many radios are being loudly played. Again, the use of the plural marker "s," the use of the plural form of the verb, and our intuitive understanding of the language all serve to give the reader immediate feedback on his/her perceptions of language forms.

6. Most nouns that end in o and that are preceded by a consonant add es when used in the plural, as in:

Singular	Plural
veto	vetoes
mosquito	mosquitoes
volcano	volcanoes

For example: I would rather be bitten by only one mosquito than by many mosquitoes!" (No explanation required!)

Again the student should remember that the examples above serve only to illustrate the most basic rules for pluralization. The project tutor and any comprehensive grammar handbook may serve as guides for further, in-depth, study. In all instances, the examples given are provided to aid the student in his/her effort to use words correctly so that their meaning may be communicated accurately. This is not always an easy task!

The appropriate use of possessives provides another area where students need to ascertain that their use of 's, s' and other "signals" are all written according to standard usage. In this way, both the writer and the reader are more likely to be using the same code to extract equivalent meaning from words. A brief summary of the most common uses of possessive notation follows (Rule, 1963):

1. To form the possessive singular, just add 's to the singular form of the noun, as in "the student's book" or "the professor's lectures."

2. To form the possessive plural, merely re-write the noun in a plural form, and then add the apostrophe after that plural marker. So, if many students are sharing the same book, this would be shown by writing "the students' book," and if the lectures of more than one professor are being discussed, writing "the professors' lectures" would identify that fact. "The man's wives" communicates a totally different meaning to the observant reader than does "the men's wives." And these messages impact on the reader's ability to receive accurate messages from the material being read.

3. However, when a word ends in either the letter "s" or in the "s sound," it is customary to add only an apostrophe after that given "s" without adding another "s". Thus, the student would write "Thomas' class schedule" only because this is easier for most people to pronounce!

As indicated in the preceding paragraphs, these rules provide a guide to only the most common forms of possessive nouns. There are more rules and exceptions to those rules! The LLD student and his/her PS IM LD tutor should, as always, be aware of further examples in the student's own reading and writing materials as well as in the project's ample software and skilltext files. In that way, these pages can serve as a small manual to facilitate student growth in the accurate use of words as cues in the extraction of meaning from written materials.

Another common way that word meanings in English are altered is through the use of affixes, or small "additions" to the beginning and/or ending of the base (root) word. When these additions are "tacked on" at the beginning of the

root word, they are called "prefixes." When they are added at the end, they're called "suffixes." Suffixes are more common than prefixes; even plural indicators, such as "s" and "es" are considered suffixes. The student should study the meanings and examples of the prefixes and suffixes discussed below, and should, as usual, find further instances of these in his/her own classwork.

Prefixes

Prefix	Means	Example
un-	"not" or "the opposite"	unknown, untied
in-	"not" or "inside"	incorrect, inborn
re-	"again"	retake, refill, redo
ex-	out former	exhale, exhaust ex-student, ex-president
pre-	before	pre-session prerequisite
anti-	against	antiwar
semi-	twice in a period partly	semiweekly semiconscious
sub-	below	submarine, substandard

The student should also study the chart that follows for some well-chosen examples of common prefixes with which students are especially likely to come into contact during their college years. All of these charts are included with the sole intention of increasing LLD student awareness of the significant role played by the common conventions of written language. The inclusion or omission of a simple "s," "es," "'s" "s;" "pre-," "-tion," or "semi-" for example, can cause significant changes to the substance of what is being communicated to the reader. Efficient readers are aware of these cues in their language.

COMBINING FORMS

Form	Meaning	Example
bio	life	**bio**graphy
geo	earth	**geo**logy
micro	small	**micro**phone
meter	device for measuring	thermo**meter**
ology	science or study	bi**ology**
phono	sound	**phono**graph
photo	light	**photo**graph
pseudo	false	**pseudo**nym
scope	device for seeing, observing	miscro**scope**
tele	distant	**tele**gram

PREFIXES WITH ONE MEANING

Form	Meaning	Example
auto	self	**auto**mobile
extra	outside	**extra**ordinary
fore	before	**fore**head
hyper	too much	**hyper**active
inter	between, among	**inter**state
intra	within	**intra**venous
mal	bad	**mal**treat
mis	wrong	**mis**take
multi	many	**multi**colored
non	after, later	**non**resident

(Deighton, 1978)

A list of common suffixes, their usual meanings, and examples follows. (Don't forget to add to it with your project tutor!)

Most English suffixes do little to change the meaning of words. Generally, they function to change a noun from singular to plural or to show that the word's "job" has changed so that it has become a different grammatical part of speech than before.

Noun Suffixes	Examples
ance	importance, alliance
ence	difference, influence
er	adviser, bowler
ion	action, correction
ist	pianist, chemist
ment	government, statement
ness	kindness, brightness
or	actor, instructor
ty	certainty, safety
y	party, honesty

Verb Suffixes	Examples
ate	create, nominate
en	lengthen, broaden
ify	glorify, purify
ize	organize, burglarize

Adjective Suffixes	Examples
al	formal, normal
ant	pleasant, ignorant
en	woolen, wooden
ent	confident, different
ful	careful, useful
ish	childish, foolish
ive	active, creative
ly	friendly, homely
ous	marvelous, curious
y	dirty, smoky

(Deighton, 1979)

Just as the student's awareness of roots serving to anchor (various) affixes contributes to his understanding of words, so does his/her awareness of the probable derivation of these root words. Many of our common English words have been derived from standard Greek or Latin affixes. Again, having knowledge of these derivations and their original meanings can serve to assist the reader in unlocking meanings in his/her daily reading.

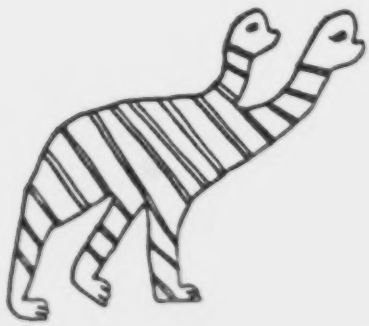
Examples of Common Roots

Root	*Meaning*	*Example*	*Definition*
agri-	field	agronomy	*Field*—crop production and soil management
anthropo-	man	anthropology	The study of *man*
astro-	star	astronaut	One who travels in interplanetary space *(stars)*
bios-	life	biology	The study of *life*
cardio-	heart	cardiac	Pertaining to the *heart*
chromo-	color	chromatology	The science of *colors*
demos-	people	democracy	Government by the *people*
derma-	skin	epidermis	The outer layer of *skin*
dyna-	power	dynamic	Characterized by *power* and energy
geo-	earth	geology	The study of the *earth*
helio-	sun	heliotrope	Any plant that turns toward the *sun*
hydro-	water	hydroponics	Growing of plants in *water* reinforced with nutrients
hypno-	sleep	hypnosis	A state of *sleep* induced by suggestion
magni-	great, big	magnify	To enlarge, to make *bigger*
man(u)-	hand	manuscript	Written by *hand*
mono-	one	monoplane	Airplane with *one* wing
ortho-	straight	orthodox	Right, true, *straight* opinion
-pod	foot	pseudopod	False *foot*
psycho-	mind	psychology	Study of the *mind* in any of its aspects
pyro-	fire	pyrometer	An instrument for measuring temperatures
terra-	earth	terrace	A raised platform of *earth*
thermo-	heat	thermo-electricity	Electricity produced by *heat*
zoo-	animal	zoology	The study of *animals*

(Pauk, 1984)

This listing and others like it should point out to all students just how common Latin and Greek derivations are in the words that we use. In addition, such a list can serve as a resource to LLD students, in particular, to suggest probably meanings of words solely on the basis of their Greek or Latin roots. This is a favorite technique of scholars as they try to find "short cuts" to word definitions. Try it!

Just for fun (well-almost!) the student's attention is directed to the example below wherein a science fiction animal called a "Lineatus bicephalotriped" was to be created by the reader. Because the reader knew the precise meanings in this chart and because the reader was also familiar with the use of affixes and roots in deciphering the meaning of unknown words provided by the writer, s/he was then able to accurately create both a mental and physical picture of the animal knowing only its name.



Scientists' Vocabulary Chart

bi	– two	melano	– black
tri	– three	leuco	– white
quadro	– four	erythro	– red
penta	– five	bruno	– brown
mono	– one	lineatus	– lined
pedi	– foot	punctata	– dotted
cornis	– horn		
cephalus	– head		

(Johnson and Pearson, 1984)

V. Conclusion

Norris (UNL, 1984) has written that "reading must...be constructed through a purposeful and meaningful interaction between author and reader." Words are signposts that guide and encourage accurate interpretation of what has been read and thus promote the interaction suggested above. Used as aids to problem solving, words help the reader to reconstruct the author's intended meaning. To be able to perform this study task effectively is a universal academic goal!

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Recommended Student Resources

Durkin, D. (1981). Strategies for Identifying Unknown Words, 2nd ed. Allyn and Bacon, Boston.

Rule, J. M. (1963). The Structure of Words, Educators' Publishing Service, Boston.

A set of any standard collegiate dictionary and thesaurus.

Specific PS IM LD Resources
(available for check-out BMC 250A)

Books

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Software

From Micro Power and Light Co.
Word Preparation - Advanced
Challenging Analogies

From American Education Computer, Inc.
Reading Comprehension